DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 987 CE 048 449

AUTHOR Stanage, Sherman M.
TITLE Adult Education as Empowerment: A Phenomenology of the Process of Empowering Adult Learners.
PUB DATE Oct 87
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Washington, DC, October 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Adult Students; *Educational Objectives; *Individual Power; *Phenomenology; *Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

This paper provides the grounds for showing how empowerment of adult learners can be viewed as the central goal of adult education. Using phenomenological methods, the paper first lays out a description and clarification of the process of empowerment. Second, it shows how this process is absolutely fundamental to all adult learning. Finally, the paper identifies a variety of research projects of utmost importance for adult education that can be undertaken in the area of phenomenological investigation. Suggestions for research follow from the claims that empowerment is a process and that this process is fundamental and vital for all adult learning. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED294987

A Phenomenology of the Process of Empowering Adult Learners

Sherman M. Stanage
Professor of Philosophy and
Professor of Leadership and Educational Policy Studies-
Adult Education
Northern Illinois University

Introduction

This paper will provide the grounds for showing how empowerment of adult learners can be viewed as the nuclear goal of adult education. Using phenomenological methods, the paper will (1) lay out a description and clarification of the process of empowerment; (2) show how this process is absolutely fundamental to all adult learning; and (3) identify a variety of research projects of utmost importance for adult education which follow from the claims that empowerment is a process and that this process is fundamental and vital for all adult learning.

Power and Empowerment

There may be many kinds of power. Surely the term 'power' is used in quite different ways. When the term is used in special reference to persons, however, power is a person's ability to do something, or to act upon a person, an object, or to act in terms of some idea. My power is my physical, mental, or moral strength, might, or vigor. Power is a process through which my energy and my character are expressed. My power is an enabling process, even the activating and originating process of my animate and vital being. My power is a kind of control I have, or my command (of some kind and in some degree) over something, such as a great range of activities within my mundane world. Power is a range of degrees, and one kind or another, of domination, rule, influence, and authority which persons have or could have under certain circumstances.

My power, and your power, in certain circumstances, might be influence in the form of political ascendancy, as in exercising influence in the government of a nation, city, or neighborhood. My power may be legal ability, as in the sense of delegated authority, commission, or faculty. Power may be any or all of these, but in adult education contexts power refers especially to a feeling, an experiencing, and/or an understanding that one learns what this power is in degrees and kinds, learns that one already has it in some degree, and comes to know that this is so.

To empower me is to invest me formally or even legally with power or authority, or to authorize me as having a certain power or powers. I may also be empowered through self-generated acts and activities. In either case, power has become my own, and I have further become the degrees and kinds of my power(s), toward possible ends and goals of achieving specific purposes in my world. Empowerment is either (or both) an action which gives some

CE 054 845

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S Stanage
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

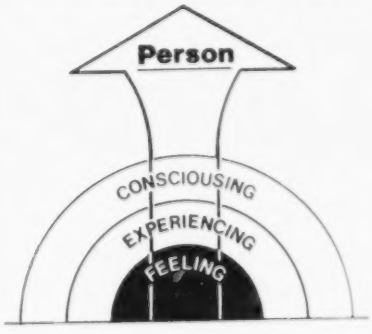
power to me, or it is my state of having an identifiable power of some kind and in some degree.

Knowing how to read and to write are empowerments, for example. When my teachers assisted me toward knowledge and understanding in some degree they participated in my empowerment; they helped me move toward the possession of degrees and kinds of powers. My baccalaureate degree attests my successful completion of a prescribed course of study within an institution of higher learning (a further degree and kind of empowerment). It presents me to the world as a person who is entitled to all the rights and privileges appertaining to that degree... and to that unique kind of empowerment. This is a paradigm case of a community's empowerment of one of its members.

Some persons within any community of persons are said to be professionals, skilled persons, and experts especially competent in their performances. Professionals have a determinate occupation within which they profess and practice their special skills, and they apply their arts, crafts, sciences, technologies, and techniques in their own lives and in the lives of others. Even if some professionals have not received certifying and licensing attestations they still may be seen as competent, as persons with special powers, fit, appropriate, and proper to the performance of circumscribed activities and tasks. Their powers are suitable to these tasks, sufficient to their performance. Even if not formally licensed, these persons are competent or skilled in their powers of performance. They are capable of accomplishing something with sufficient precision, practical knowledge, ability, cleverness, and expertness. They are skilled. And some are experts, or persons with special powers within their community. The knowledge they have is their power within the community. How did they -- how do I-- move through the process (and it is a process) of possessing power(s) and and of having power(s) ready at hand? This is the process of empowering persons, some of whom are adult learners.

Person and The Place of Person Among Persons

The distinction between **person** and person is absolutely vital in any phenomenology of the process of empowering adult learners. **Person** is the full eduction of what persons are, have in common, and makes possible communication on the foundation provided by the intersubjectivity of persons within the coexistence of persons. **Person** is what is drawn forth, pulled out, or what flows forth from persons in their lifeworlds, or what intimately flows from persons through their feeling, their experiencing, and their consciousing, from within the intersubjectivity of persons in their coexistence. Feeling, experiencing, and consciousing are 'eductions' of **person**. An



adult is what a certain degree and kind of critical synthesis of 'eductions' of **person** called 'adult eductions' of **person** are and do within the lifeworld of persons.

Knowing, Learning, and the Will-to-Empowerment

Knowing something is a kind of power possessed and power in hand. Knowing is an enabling, a power, and therefore an empowerment. Learning requires that there first be some knowledge, but the most essential characteristic of learning is that it is always knowing-that-is-still-to-be-done, or knowing always more fully to be accomplished. Learning is knowledge yet-to-be-enacted and thereby possessed and ready at hand. When knowledge as yet-to-be-enacted has become learned, this knowledge has become a power, and the person possessing this knowledge and having it ready at hand has thereby become empowered. Empowerment is a process, but what is this process?

The focus of my thoughts--the object most in my consciousness-- as I prepare these remarks is the process of empowerment of adult learners. I search carefully through my own feelings, my own experiencings, and within my own understanding, and I find that first of all I am a lived body engaged in this preparation. My body is particular, individual, and unique. My world is my felt world, my experienced world, and my consciousness world, with my individualized body as its center of senses, interests, and purposive actions.

Moreover, as a lived body I conscious. It is not so much that I find empowerment in my consciousness as it is that I feel, experience, and conscious the possibility of my empowerment. If I thereby possibilize my empowerment there must be powers which I can acquire, an empowered person whom I can become, itself the intended object of 'eductions' of my feelings, experiencings, and consciousings. This reflexivity, this reflexive turn, through which I discover the phenomenon of my possibilized empowerment is itself evidence that I have learned that (1) I know something about my empowerment and that (2) there is more for me to learn about it. But there is always the question: Will I respond in some purposive way to this possibilized power, this empowerment of my life?

The Oxford English Dictionary observes that the most remarkable feature of "will" when used as a verb, besides its many idiomatic and phrasal uses, centers in its use as a regular auxiliary of the future tense. It is this sense which Alfred Schutz intends when he stated that "in order to protect my future action as it will roll on I have to place myself in my phantasy at a future time when this action will already have been accomplished, when the resulting act will already have materialized." This significant use in our language itself suggests the manner in which will and willing (and willingness) dominate feelings, experiencings, and consciousings within the lived world of the adult.

My lived body, my consciousing -- all here and now -- move through temporal spans. They take time. They express interest through time. This individual self which I am is my center of interest. My interest is fundamentally my feeling accompanying any instance of my attending-to something, whether object, person, idea, cluster of ideas, or state of affairs. Interest at first is feeling's grasp of something. When I attend-to something I rather feel and experience that I am pulled toward it. I am "here" and "now," whereas what I attend-to is "there" and "then." The object of my interest has the character of something which ought to be realized in the future. It is an ought-to-be in my life.

I feel, experience, and conscious effort expended in this pulling. It is a power, an energy, a force, exertion, and efficacy touching me and grasping me. My resistance to this pulling effect is experienced as an effort, and felt, experienced, and consciousd as degrees and kinds of effort within my lived body.

Feeling, Experiencing, Consciousing, Will, and the Will-to-Empowerment

My life body at work. Consciousing. My interest expressed through identifiable temporal spans. Specific objects attended-to through interest expressed. My effort expended, felt, experienced, consciousd, as pulled toward some future, some possibilized state of affairs. Feelings of my lived body pushing myself toward a future state of affairs within which my lived body will be located, but a future state as conceived now. These phenomena are clearly among the available evidence attesting the presence of will and willing in a person. They are therefore evidence of the will-to-empowerment in a person. This evidence is arrived at not through introspection but through retrospection.

Retrospectively, we may study the positioning of the will-to-empowerment in a person's life through the degrees of commissive language which (s)he uses in describing what is an absence of a willingess to learn, or what in fact is a willingess to learn through some learning project. Commissive language is the language of commitment. In committing ourselves we consent, we intend, and we act. That is, we agree to act, we promise to act, and we act. An act of willing is a conscious process which begins with deliberate choice and with resolution of questions and conflicts, and continues through decisions and resolution. An act of willing ends with the realization of what is willed, the execution of the willed state of affairs.

Consider now the structure of the will and willing. First, we may say that to structure is to build. To structure anything is to form it into an organization of parts and elements into a whole of these parts and elements. The structure is the coexistence in a whole of distinct parts having a definite manner of arrangement. The structure is what is built or constructed. Therefore, the structure of the will is the lived body at work through

consciousing activities. These consciousing activities are specific interests moving through temporal spans, interests attending-to certain ideas selected from among others which could be attended-to, and which might be attended-to at some future time. A specific state of affairs has been possibilized in the present. This possibilization itself is an expenditure of effort felt, experienced, and consciousedas a being-pulled toward that possibilized state of affairs, toward another kind, and a greater degree, of empowerment.

The essential structure of the will-to-empowerment is in place -- is positioned in one' consciousness -- as an essential structure logically antecedent to any episode of one's actual willingess to learn, to know more, and thereby to become empowered in some further degree and in some special way(s). A person then can be said to be disposed to learn, and this is a disposition toward empowerment. If this person is an adult, then we may speak of an adult learner's disposition toward empowerment. This too is a stage in the process of empowerment of this adult learner. Relevant elements have been positioned in appropriate order in one's feelings, experiencings, and consciousings. That person may be said to be disposed toward learning something through relevant redistribution and rearrangement of these feelings, experiencings, and consciousings toward greater effectiveness, economy, ease, or conformity to a pattern of active but orderly steps in capturing ideas or in altering states of affairs.

The location of the essential structure of the will-to-learn as an instance of a singular episode of the willingness to take on new powers -- to become further empowered -- evidences one's dispositional character toward learning. This evidence emerges out of one's commitment toward the possibilized yet-to-be-learned, one's whole-hearted interest toward, and responsibility for, the particular state of affairs to be actualized through a given learning project. We therefore have further evidence that (1) empowerment is indeed a process and that (2) empowerment is absolutely fundamental and vital to all adult learning.

To have knowledge is to have the power to do something. A description of what this particular knowledge is is the precise description of what this particular enabling power is. Knowledge is both possessing this power and having this power in hand. Learning something is both the process of coming into the possession of knowledge and of having this power in hand, such that what has been learned is this knowledge fully possessed and fully in hand.

A phenomenological description of some of the stages through which this process moves is both an identification and a description of certain essential structures of phenomena of degrees and kinds of empowerment and clusters of phenomena relevant in any understanding of learning how to learn. Learning how to learn, or learning to learn, in my judgment, is one of the two most vital expressions of the will-to-empowerment of the adult learner. Among

some of the easily identifiable essential structures of the empowering process through which the adult learner moves are the following ones:

(1) There is a stage at which it can said that I do not know that I do not know that the kinds of power I possess are of a very low degree of relevance to larger states of affairs in my lifeworld.

(2) There is a further stage at which I can be said to know that I do not know what I want to know or need to know in order thereby to acquire certain powers and thus to become further empowered.

(3) There is a stage at which I know that I want to know or need to know something in particular in order to acquire certain power(s), and thus to become further empowered.

(4) There is a stage at which I begin to know this something-in-particular. Perhaps I am beginning to realize that I am further empowered, but do not fully comprehend the implications of being so.

(5) There are many additional stages in coming to comprehend that I am much further empowered than I was at some earlier time in my life. But in comprehending this I must know that I know it. Therefore, The phenomenon of knowing that I know something must be placed alongside the phenomenon of learning how to learn as one of the two most vital expressions of the will-to-empowerment of the adult learner.

Conclusion

I believe the paper has performed the promises laid out in its introduction. In addition, it can be pointed out that a great variety of research projects, and entire research programs, can engage in phenomenological investigations into any of the claims presented above, especially those claims related to the 'eductions' of **person** which feeling, experiencing, and consciousing are. Finally, the phenomena which constitute the processes of coming to know that one knows and learning how to learn can be investigated through phenomenological methods as well.

Notes

1 Most of the claims staked out in this paper are mined in much greater detail in Sherman M. Stanage, Adult Education and Phenomenological Research: New Directions for Theory, Practice, and Research, Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1987, 421 pp. 'Phenomenology' is defined and characterized thoroughly.

2 Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, I, ed., Maurice Natanson, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, pp. 68-69.